

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly
FORTY-SIXTH SESSION
Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
55th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 18 December 1991
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 55th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/46/SR.55
8 January 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

91-57899 5539S

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The meeting was called to order at 3.50 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM (continued) A/46/7/Add.7 and Corr.1; A/C.5/46/33; A/C.5/46/L.13

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the Secretary-General's report on the financial implications of the decisions and recommendations of the Civil Service Commission (ICSC) (A/C.5/46/33) and to the Advisory Committee's report on that item (A/46/7/Add.7 and Corr.1). He proposed that the Committee should take note of those reports.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.13, noting that the decisions taken under sections I to VI were based on the recommendations of the ICSC and that the draft resolution included four additional sections dealing with various other questions. The draft resolution represented a balance between the sometimes conflicting views expressed in informal consultations; he commended it to the Committee for adoption without a vote.

4. Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.13 was adopted without a vote.

AGENDA ITEM 117: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM (continued) (A/C.5/46/L.14)

5. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.14, pointing out that sections II and III dealt with the two key issues of the pensionable remuneration and pensions of staff in the General Service and related categories and of ungraded officials. The draft resolution represented a delicate balance of the sometimes widely divergent views expressed in informal discussions; he therefore commended it to the Committee for adoption without a vote.

6. Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.14 was adopted without a vote.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993 (continued) (A/C.5/46/L.15 and A/C.5/46/L.17)

Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.15

7. Mr. DANKWA (Ghana), introducing the draft resolution, pointed out that it consisted of two parts, part A, which dealt with issues relating to the budget and part B, which related to sections of the proposed programme budget. The draft resolution endorsed the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) on changes in the staffing table of the Organization, and asked the Secretary-General to indicate his proposed changes in the organization of the Secretariat, particularly with regard to high-level posts, in revised estimates to be submitted to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session. It also endorsed the recommendation of CPC on the convening of a

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(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

seminar on the methodology used for the preparation of the programme budget. Under section IX of part A, the General Assembly would take note of the adjustment made by the Secretary-General to the preliminary estimates and would decide to set the revised level of the contingency fund at \$18 million. Under section X, the General Assembly would decide that a turnover rate of 0.5 per cent should be applied in respect of General Service staff in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993. He expressed the hope that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

8. Mr. INOMATA (Japan) said that he wished to confirm his delegation's agreement in large measure with the contents of the draft resolution. However, it still had some difficulties, particularly with regard to paragraph 2 of section XV in part A. It would therefore state its final position when the General Assembly took up the draft resolution in plenary meeting.

9. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation would also state its final position on the draft resolution in the plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

10. Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.15 was adopted without a vote.

Draft decision A/C.5/46/L.17

11. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico), introducing the draft decision, said that it was the product of an intense process of consultation among delegations. He therefore hoped it would be adopted without a vote.

12. Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.15 was adopted without a vote.

AGENDA ITEM 105: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

Administrative, structural and other aspects of the improvement of the efficiency of the Organization (A/46/633)

13. The CHAIRMAN proposed that, in view of the constraints of time, the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the matter and keep the item under review. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to his proposal.

14. It was so decided.

15. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) asked whether the decision to keep the matter under review meant that it could be taken up at a resumed session of the Committee in early 1992.

16. The CHAIRMAN said that, in his understanding, that was a correct reading of the decision.

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Extrabudgetary resources of the United Nations (A/46/545)

17. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the General Assembly should also take note of the report on extrabudgetary resources, contained in document A/46/545, and should defer the matter to the forty-seventh session.

18. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that, while her delegation would not stand in the way of the adoption of the decision, it was concerned by the Committee's failure to deal properly with the very important issue of extrabudgetary resources. The issue had only been considered very briefly in the consultations on the programme budget, because delegations had believed it would be taken up substantively when the Secretary-General's report was considered. While Cuba accepted that the Committee's work was affected by constraints of time, it regretted the decision to defer the matter, which was inconsistent with the priorities agreed upon by States.

19. Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the reservations expressed by Cuba. Colombia had, for some time, insisted on the need for the Committee to consider the issue of extrabudgetary resources in depth, since such consideration had not been possible in CPC. He still hoped, therefore, that it might be possible for the issue to be considered later at the current session.

20. Mr. INOMATA (Japan), recalling the intention of the Secretariat to develop management and workload analysis techniques and the request by the General Assembly to the Secretary-General to take into account the results of such techniques in the preparation of proposed programme budgets to ensure full implementation of all programmes and activities of the United Nations, as specified in paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 45/254 A, regretted that the Committee had received no report on the item and that it had proceeded to conduct its analysis of the budget on a section-by-section basis, with clearly unsatisfactory results. His delegation hoped that the Secretariat could indicate how it intended to implement the provisions of paragraph 13 of resolution 45/254 A. He suggested that the matter should be deferred to the forty-seventh session and noted that discussion on the item thus remained incomplete. A decision by the General Assembly to defer its discussion of an item, which it had either failed to conclude or not taken up at all, was a procedural matter and should not entail any value judgements. He regretted that, owing to the absence of a particular report, delegations had been asked to disregard an important topic and suggested, therefore, that the matter should be taken up at the resumed session.

21. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the General Assembly should take note of the report of the Secretary-General on extrabudgetary resources (A/46/545) and should defer the matter to a later stage in the current session, taking into account the views expressed by the members of the Fifth Committee.

22. It was so decided.

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Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Management Advisory Service of the United Nations (A/46/327)

23. The CHAIRMAN said that he would take it that the Committee wished to defer the question of the Management Advisory Service of the United Nations to the forty-seventh session.

24. It was so decided.

Facilities management (A/45/796 and Add.1)

25. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on facilities management contained in documents A/45/796 and Add.1 but, owing to the late issuance of the documents, had been unable to examine them during its second session in 1990. As stated in the report, the development of a globally integrated approach to facilities management was central for the administrative and financial efficiency of programme 43, General services, given the magnitude of the investment involved. In the past, programme budget preparation had been based on the immediate maintenance requirements of each location in isolation, without an assessment of global needs within a coordinated programme designed to set priorities and even out over time the potential for "surges" in the need for budgetary appropriations.

26. The Secretary-General noted, however, that the failure to develop an integrated programme meant that those "scattered" appropriations would be used less effectively and that some properties might not receive timely maintenance or necessary repair and technical modernization. Accordingly, a coordinated and integrated approach to facilities management was being formulated.

27. At the same time, the Secretary-General had emphasized that such a programme would require not only coordinated, long-range planning but also adequate financial resources. The properties covered by that programme were the principal properties occupied by the United Nations worldwide, as described in the Secretary-General's report. The report also discussed implications for long-range major maintenance and the modernization of the existing buildings, and outlined the technical, administrative and budgetary basis for a globally integrated and coordinated facilities management policy.

28. The Secretary-General explained that major maintenance requirements varied with the age of buildings, the type of construction, climate and the adequacy of regular budget maintenance programmes. With a reasonably large and diverse building inventory, however, it was possible to propose guidelines for minimum annual levels of expenditure for repair and maintenance on a global basis. The report also noted that in certain countries and organizations the target rate for annual expenditure on buildings was set at 1.8 per cent or 2 per cent of the gross replacement cost of the structures concerned. The anticipated useful life of major building components was also

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(Mr. Mselle)

used as a basis for the determination of maintenance expenses. The high level of funding involved in such an approach, however, meant that it was rarely applied in practice.

29. Paragraph 9 of the report set the estimated total value of all land and buildings owned or leased by the Organization at nominal or no cost at approximately \$4,339 million, of which \$1,652 million represented the current value of the buildings it owned. In paragraph 17, the Secretary-General pointed out that if the 1.8 per cent guideline had been applied, a maintenance budget of \$59.6 million, or \$29.8 million in annual terms, would have been established for the 1990-1991 biennium, as compared to the actual appropriation of \$8.3 million.

30. Soon a substantial number of buildings would pass their theoretical 35- to 40-year "middle-age threshold", after which obsolescence and deterioration accelerated and buildings required increased major maintenance and repairs, and the Secretary-General had concluded that increased difficulties could be predicted over the next few years unless immediate steps were taken by all responsible parties involved to increase their maintenance efforts significantly. That did not mean that the budget planning basis of guideline rates should be taken as a substitute for the careful analysis of special needs and maintenance requirements of each individual facility. The Secretary-General believed, however, that a global maintenance budget substantially and consistently below the guideline rate was clear evidence of chronic underbudgeting and a signal of potential future problems.

31. The Advisory Committee had been informed that the Secretary-General's intention in submitting his report was, in addition to presenting Member States for the first time with an inventory of buildings and properties owned or occupied by the Organization at the principal duty stations, to heighten the awareness of Member States of the need for a coordinated programme of facilities management and to inform them what such a programme would entail in general terms, without making a specific proposal. From paragraph 30 of the report, the Advisory Committee noted that the Secretary-General had intended to elaborate on the programme in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993. While that had not proved possible, the Advisory Committee had been informed that work would be completed by the next biennium on priorities in major maintenance and that a systematic plan would be developed by the next medium-term plan.

32. In the meantime, studies were being prepared on the long-term space requirements of the Organization and the cost-effectiveness of existing leased properties, which would help determine the best way of meeting the Organization's current and future requirements. The Advisory Committee welcomed the report, which was a very useful compendium of information and a credit to the Secretariat. It contained no specific proposals: those would only be forthcoming by the next biennium. The Advisory Committee had been informed that the report was, rather, the first step towards a more coherent approach to major maintenance. The Advisory Committee accordingly urged the

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(Mr. Mselle)

Secretary-General to pursue the studies indicated in his report, with a view to formulating comprehensive and viable proposals regarding the Organization's requirements with respect not only to major maintenance, but also to the related issue of long-term space requirements, in particular at its main duty stations.

33. The CHAIRMAN said that he would take it that the Fifth Committee wished to take note with appreciation of the report of the Secretary-General on facilities management in documents A/45/796 and Add.1 and of the relevant comments and observations of the Advisory Committee; to encourage the Secretary-General to continue with the formulation of an integrated and coordinated approach to facilities management, with a view to achieving greater efficiency in the administrative and financial structures of the Secretariat; and to request the Secretary-General to report periodically on specific aspects of the matter as appropriate.

34. It was so decided.

Draft resolution A/C.5/46/L.16

35. Ms. MUSTONEN (Finland), introducing the draft resolution, said that the need for the Fifth Committee to rationalize its work had been particularly evident at the current session and that it was vital for the Committee to return to its biennial practice.

36. The preambular part of the resolution emphasized the need to bear in mind the increased workload borne by the Fifth Committee and recalled the Committee's previous practice of following a biennial cycle in its programme of work. The operative part of the resolution accepted the biennial approach, except in respect of those items which were mandated for annual consideration. The draft resolution took as its starting-point the belief that all items susceptible to biennialization should be biennialized. That principle applied to more than half of the items before the Fifth Committee.

37. The annex to the draft resolution detailed the Committee's programme of work, identifying items subject to annual consideration, those to be considered biennially in odd years and those considered biennially in even years. Odd years would focus on the United Nations budget for the next biennium, while even years could be regarded as personnel years. She drew particular attention to footnote 4, which indicated that the United Nations staff list and the statistical report on the composition of the Secretariat would be issued also in odd years for information purposes, and pointed out that they would require no consideration by the General Assembly. Special provision was made for the scale of assessments, which would be subject to consideration as required. Footnote 7 recommended the consideration of that item twice in three years.

38. Part II of the annex set forth the Committee's programme of work for 1992 and 1993, in the light of the biennialization of its work. The 1993 programme would be further updated in 1992.

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(Ms. Mustonen, Finland)

39. Noting that the Committee's working methods had changed immensely over the past few years, owing, in particular, to its well-known and time-consuming practice of endeavouring always to reach consensus, she expressed the conviction of her delegation that biennialization of the Committee's work represented an important step towards rationalization. She commended the draft resolution to the Committee for adoption without a vote.

40. Mr. BIDNY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, when the Committee had discussed the report of the Committee on Contributions, the Soviet Union had stated its position regarding the time scale of the proposed scale of assessments and had urged, and continued to urge, adoption of the one-year term proposed by that Committee. For the reasons it had advanced in the course of the general discussion on the item, and in view of the stage of negotiations on the draft resolution on the scale of assessments, which rendered probable the necessity for the item to be considered by the General Assembly during the 1992 session, the Soviet Union wished to add to the list in part II A of the draft resolution, Programme of work for 1992, an additional item 15, Scale of assessments, with the footnote: "Should the need arise." His delegation was convinced that the Department of Conference Services should bear that eventuality in mind and should make appropriate arrangements.

41. Mr. CONMY (Ireland) said that he welcomed the draft resolution, since the Committee's current work practices left much to be desired. With regard to the point raised by the representative of the Soviet Union, he pointed out that, although footnote 7 to section D, paragraph 1, implied that the matter would not be considered at the forty-seventh session, the provisions of paragraph 4 of the resolution meant that the subject could be taken up if the urgency of the situation so required. He therefore appealed to the representative of the Soviet Union to withdraw his amendment and allow the resolution to be adopted.

42. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands) said that he understood the concerns expressed by the representative of the Soviet Union but, like the representative of Ireland, he believed that they were already covered by the provisions of paragraph 4. He therefore asked the representative of the Soviet Union to withdraw his amendment.

43. Mr. BIDNY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that paragraph 4 concerned the submission of reports, whereas he was concerned about an agenda item. It would be useful to have the possibility of dealing with the matter on the 1992 agenda, should that prove necessary.

44. Mr. COHEN (United States of America) said that he fully supported the resolution and agreed with the remarks made by the representative of Ireland. He pointed out that section D allowed for "consideration as required" and, given that under rule 160 of the rules of procedure the scale of assessments was to be fixed for three years, he felt that the question was adequately covered. Footnote 7, specifying that the General Assembly should consider the matter twice in three years, was to be seen only as a recommendation.

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45. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) said that he supported the amendment proposed by the representative of the Soviet Union to include the scale of assessments as part of the programme of work for 1992, in case it proved necessary to consider the matter at the next session. If it proved unnecessary, reference to the item could subsequently be omitted, but it was important that the possibility should remain open. He felt that footnote 7 should be amended to make it clear that it was a recommendation, since as it stood it was in contradiction with the heading to section D.

46. Mr. KARBUCZKY (Hungary) said that, as no decision had yet been taken on the scale of assessments, it was too early to judge whether the matter needed to be taken up the following year. The programme of work for 1992 could be amended in the light of the action the Assembly took at the current session on agenda item 114.

47. Ms. MUSTONEN (Finland) said that she agreed with the suggestion made by the representative of Hungary. A revised version of the resolution could be issued if necessary.

48. Mr. BIDNY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation still had doubts. It was not clear how, when and by whom subsequent changes to the programme would be made if an amendment was not included at the current stage. He did not fully understand the procedure involved.

49. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said that he understood the concerns expressed by the representatives of the Soviet Union and Mexico. He proposed that it should be indicated in the annex to the draft resolution that the year in which the report of the Committee on Contributions was to be considered would be decided in the resolution on that item.

50. Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) proposed that footnote 7 should be deleted, since it was in contradiction with the heading to section D, as the representative of Mexico had pointed out. That would remove the need for any future amendments and would mean that the question of the scale of assessments could be included on the agenda whenever necessary.

51. Mr. BIDNY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the difficulties the Committee was encountering were all related to the failure to resolve the question of the scale of assessments itself. He therefore proposed that the Committee should defer taking a decision on the draft resolution until after the resolution on the scale of assessments had been adopted.

52. Ms. MUSTONEN (Finland) endorsed that proposal.

53. The Soviet proposal was adopted.

54. Mr. INOMATA (Japan), speaking on a point of order, drew attention to document A/C.5/46/CRP.1 on the application of workload analysis techniques at the United Nations. He pointed out that neither the Chairman nor the

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(Mr. Inomata, Japan)

Secretariat had mentioned the document during the introduction to the item. Its contents were important and he proposed that it should be discussed at the resumed session.

55. Mr. TIEWUL (Secretary of the Committee) said that the conference room paper had been issued some time ago. As the documentation for the item under consideration was far from complete, the representative of Japan was quite right to propose that the document should be considered at the resumed session.

56. Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) endorsed the proposal made by the representative of Japan.

57. The Japanese proposal was adopted.

58. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) welcomed the decision but expressed regret that the Fifth Committee had failed to consider all the reports under the item in question. She also regretted the inadequacy of the documentation available, which had made no reference to the implementation of the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations. She looked forward to taking up the reports in question at the resumed session, particularly document A/46/633.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

(continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/46/L.55 concerning agenda item 143 (A/C.5/46/78)

59. The CHAIRMAN said that he had been informed by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that draft resolution A/46/L.55 had no financial implications. He would take it that the Fifth Committee, on the basis of the statement of programme budget implications submitted by the Secretary-General and the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, wished to inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/46/L.55, no additional appropriations would be required under the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993.

60. It was so decided.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

61. The CHAIRMAN said, with reference to agenda item 107, that four matters under the programme budget for 1992 were still outstanding, namely: the report of the Secretary-General on the conditions of service of members of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), contained in documents A/C.5/46/75 and A/C.5/46/17 and Corr.1; the report of the Secretary-General on the International Conference on Population and Development, contained in document A/C.5/46/25 and Corr.1; the report of the Secretary-General on the

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(The Chairman)

organization of editorial services, contained in document A/C.5/46/47; and the report of the Secretary-General on reimbursement of accommodation costs, contained in document A/C.5/46/56. He said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to defer consideration of those matters to a later stage.

62. It was so decided.

63. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would take a decision on the consolidated statement of programme budget implications and revised estimates at its meeting the following day and, following that decision, would also consider the report of the Fifth Committee on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993.

64. The Committee would revert to agenda items 118 (United Nations peace-keeping forces in the Middle East), 120 (United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM)) and 122 (Financing of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA)) at its next meeting when the relevant draft resolutions were available in all languages.

65. Mr. MORDACQ (France) underscored the serious delay in reimbursing troop-contributing States, owing to the backlog in United Nations peace-keeping accounts, especially in the case of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Organization had an obligation to pay the full amount due to each country. Even more unacceptable was the delay in United Nations reimbursement of invalidity and death pensions paid out by countries to their nationals who had been injured or killed in defence of peace. Administrative reasons should never come before moral obligations, and it was unconscionable that such reimbursements were not given priority.

66. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Committee had already considered the appropriations for the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) under agenda item 136 and for the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) under agenda item 146. Appropriate draft resolutions would be submitted to the Committee as soon as the texts were available.

67. With regard to the remaining peace-keeping items on the Committee's agenda - items 119 (United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG)), 121 (United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia), 123 (Administrative and budgetary aspects of peace-keeping operations) and 138 (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)) - he suggested that the Committee should recommend that the General Assembly keep those items under review and consider them at a later stage of the forty-sixth session.

68. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) observed that once again the Committee had left item 123 to the very last minute, as though the administrative and financial aspects of peace-keeping were the least important item on the agenda. The preceding day the Committee had expressed anger at the other Main Committees

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(Mr. Merifield, Canada)

because they presumed to take decisions on issues within its purview. But the real cause for concern was the Fifth Committee's inaction when another Main Committee had fully respected the former's prerogatives. The Special Political Committee resolution on the question of peace-keeping operations in all their aspects, adopted much earlier, was filled with references to the need for the Secretary-General to ensure effective management of peace-keeping operations and a strict control of expenses, and pointed to a number of administrative roadblocks that limited his ability to do so. Clearly the Special Political Committee recommendations required some kind of response.

69. He did not need to remind delegations that the peace-keeping appropriations the Committee was about to approve amounted to some \$300 million for the management of operations that had become a very significant part of the Organization's work and were a major reason for the political good will towards the United Nations. In the circumstances, Canada hoped that the plan for the rationalization of the Committee's work proposed by the representative of Finland would in future allow the Committee to give agenda item 123 the importance it deserved. Otherwise the Fifth Committee should not be surprised that it was no longer taken seriously and that other Main Committees did its work for it.

70. Mr. INOMATA (Japan) asked the Secretariat to inquire of the Advisory Committee whether its report on MINURSO would be ready by the end of December.

71. Mr. LAOUARI (Algeria) proposed that any decision on MINURSO should be deferred until the relevant reports of the Secretary-General and of the Advisory Committee were available.

72. The CHAIRMAN said that he had made his earlier suggestion for that reason. He would therefore take it that the Committee wished to recommend that the General Assembly should keep agenda items 119, 121, 123 and 138 under review and consider them at a later stage of the forty-sixth session.

73. It was so decided.

74. The CHAIRMAN appealed to all members to continue informal consultations so that a decision on the scale of assessments could be taken under item 114 without a vote at the following meeting.

OTHER MATTERS

75. The CHAIRMAN announced that Mr. Mselle had been re-elected to another three-year term as Chairman of the Advisory Committee and congratulated him on his own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Fifth Committee.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.